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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 3076
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9769
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RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0281
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2242
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI 6742
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI 4619
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 COLOMBO 001107

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TAGS: PREL PTER PHUM MOPS CE

SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: PRESIDENT MAKES PEACE AND HUMAN RIGHTS
OVERTURES AS SMALL-SCALE TIGER ATTACKS CONTINUE

REF: A. COLOMBO 1103

B. COLOMBO 1090 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: James F. Entwistle, Deputy Chief of Mission. 1.4(b,d)

¶1. (C) Summary. In a TV interview July 4, President Mahinda Rajapaksa called for the resumption of peace talks with the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in the wake of several Tiger attacks on security forces (Ref B). On July 3, a presumed Tiger explosion at a police checkpoint near Anuradhapura killed five security personnel and injured at least seven civilians even as the President met with heads of the police and security forces to urge their adherence to human rights guidelines despite Tiger provocations. Meanwhile, the Norwegian Charge' told us the Swedes plan to push back hard on the LTTE insistence EU monitors be removed from the Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM). President Rajapaksa's overtures towards peace and human rights may have little consequence without the genuine support of his administration, the security forces, and of course the Tigers, who seem ever-ready to hit military and police targets. End summary.

"Both of Us Are From Sri Lanka"

¶12. (C) In a July 4 interview on New Delhi Television (NDTV), President Rajapaksa urged the LTTE to resume peace talks with the government. He proposed that a multi-ethnic committee of experts he appointed in June would "outline" a political solution to the ethnic conflict on which the Tigers could build. The Government of Sri Lanka's (GSL) official news portal quoted Rajapaksa: "Both of us are from Sri Lanka, so we can sit down and discuss... what they want. They can amend (our outline)."

¶13. (C) In another positive move, President Rajapaksa met with the heads of the Police and Armed Forces July 4 to stress their responsibilities to uphold human rights and assist the independent Human Rights Commission in its mandate to investigate allegations of abuses by security forces, according to the independent Daily Mirror of July 5. The government also recently re-released 1997 guidelines on

police treatment of detainees.

¶4. (C) Conflict analyst Dr. Jehan Perera of the National Peace Council told poloff on July 5 called President Rajapaksa's overture to the LTTE for talks a "positive movement. Unilateral GSL manifestation of goodwill is absolutely necessary, but not sufficient," adding that the GSL must also be "absolutely determined to end the violence with the LTTE."

Black Tiger Day and Business As Usual

¶5. (C) July 5 marked "Black Tiger Day," the LTTE's commemoration of the Tigers' first suicide bombing in a 1987 ambush that killed forty army soldiers, and the martyrdom of approximately 250 Tiger suicide cadres to date. In the midst of this anniversary and President Rajapaksa's statements of commitment to a negotiated solution and human rights, the LTTE continued its increasingly commonplace small-scale attacks on military and police targets. On July 3, a three-wheeler packed with explosives killed five security personnel, including a female police constable and female homeguard, as they were stopped at a security checkpoint in north-central Anuradhapura District. The explosion also injured seven civilians in a bus behind the suicide-trishaw. On July 5, a suspected-Tiger claymore mine attack targeted a group of soldiers on foot patrol in the predominantly-Tamil area of Vavuniya, also in north-central Sri Lanka, killing one.

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Scandinavian Perspective

¶6. (C) Meanwhile, local Scandinavian contacts tell us no final decision was made at the June 29 Oslo meeting of Sri Lanka Monitoring Mission (SLMM) contributing countries regarding the LTTE demand that EU member states no longer participate in the SLMM in the wake of the EU "ban" on the Tigers. Nonetheless, Norwegian Charge' Laagreid told DCM July 5, it was decided that Sweden will make a very strong push back at the Tigers on this issue, both in London to LTTE theoretician Anton Balasingham and probably in Kilinochchi with a Swedish envoy perhaps coming to Sri Lanka soon. (SLMM head General Henricsson told the Ambassador July 4 that the Swedish Foreign Minister is "personally engaged" in this effort.)

¶7. (C) Laagreid noted that it was not at all clear that the GSL would accept a Norwegian as head of the SLMM (the only other non-EU Nordic, Iceland, was unlikely to have someone of the right caliber, he opined) given that the GSL had previously insisted that the SLMM head not be a Norwegian (thus leading to the appointment of Henricsson, a Swede). Laagreid also commented to DCM that Norway has been told nothing about President Rajapaksa's publicly-stated plans to have direct contacts with the Tigers (something he backed away from in Ref A July 4 conversation with the Ambassador) or to have the Tigers submit a proposal on "what they would accept" as a permanent solution.

¶8. (C) Laagreid said he had had trouble getting an appointment with Peace Secretariat Palitha Kohona to find out what is going on and whether Norway's facilitative assistance is needed (he finally got an appointment for later in the week). Laagreid commented that the GSL "isn't required to use our services" and Norway would not "barge into a direct process," but that such a scenario could well cause Oslo to question whether Norway's facilitative effort should continue.

Comment

¶ 9. (C) Comment. Rajapaksa's reported meeting with police and military leadership may indicate he is taking our (and others') constant message on the importance of GSL accountability for security forces' actions seriously. His overtures towards peace and human rights may have little consequence without the genuine support of the security forces on the ground, who are increasingly frustrated and frightened by the Tigers' incessant small-scale attacks against military and police targets. End comment.

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